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Empowering Our Ministry: How Much Faith is Enough?

Matthew 8:1-4

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(Reconstructed from short sermon outline)

Makarioi oi ptwcoi tw ptneumati.

Work with me on this! Repeat after me! What language is this? Yes. It's Greek. It's the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew. Specifically, it's 'blessed are the poor in spirit.' Now you know Greek!

Jesus gave the sermon on the Mount on a hill or small mountain. When He came down, he came upon the leper in this passage from Matthew 8:1-4. How did this leper know about Jesus at all? Lepers were 'unclean.' They couldn't come near their fellow Hebrews; they were given a wide berth and were supposed to give a wide berth. If a Hebrew came into too close contact with a leper, that otherwise 'clean' Hebrew would become ceremonially 'unclean' and would have to go through a lot of trouble to get back to being acceptable in the eyes of the community.

So how did the leper know to come to Jesus and ask for healing? Sure. He must have heard Jesus from the outskirts or heard someone talk about Him. Either way, he came to ask for something, to be made clean.

Did the leper have faith? I see many of you think the answer is 'yes.' Good. I agree with you. Now this question: "Did the leper have complete faith?" That is, did he have no doubts? Yes, well I see that many of you think this is the case as well. OK. Now, I want everyone who has no doubts to stand! Ooops! Where is everyone who thinks the leper has no doubts?

We all have doubts. The centurion who asked for healing for his servant came to Jesus with hope but perhaps some doubt. The father of the epileptic boy in Mark 9 is quentessentially us - to the question, 'Do you believe?' the father says, 'I do believe; help me in my unbelief.' That's who we are. We believe and don't believe a the same time. We want to believe more but stuff holds us back.

Did the leper have any doubts? I don't know. I my guess is that he did. But I am certain of one thing - that he had sufficient faith. He had enough faith.

Did the leper make the connection that Jesus was the Messiah of God? I don't know. He may have, or he may not have had this worked out. That may not be important. It may be an acceptable first step for us to recognize that Jesus can heal, that Jesus has the capacity to heal.

So he said to Jesus that if Jesus wanted to heal him, the leper believed Jesus could heal him. The Greek is helpful here. The leper says to Jesus, that if He is willing, the leper recognizes Jesus has the 'can do' to heal him. The Greek word is the verb form of the noun dunanis, which means 'power.' Jesus agreed with the leper's assessment. And Jesus said He wanted to bring healing to him. So Jesus touched the leper.

Did Jesus need to touch him? Of course not. We've seen Jesus do amazing things from a distance. So why did Jesus touch him? Here the Greek is also really helpful. [Have someone stand, show how a Presbyterian 'touches' with the three fold pat on the back; choose men as examples]. That's the way we touch, the way we imagine it happened. But that's not the way it happened. The Greek word is more than touch. It means 'take hold of.' [Go to the same man and 'take hold of him' and look him in the eyes!]. This is what Jesus did. He took hold of someone who people never even comes close to, let along touch. Jesus embraced the man and held his hands and arms and then healed the man of his leprosy.

Jesus connected with the leper, because healing is more than physical. And because the leper needed more than to have his leprosy gone, though that's all he asked for. Jesus took hold of him because Jesus loved him, and loved him so deeply that he met the leper's sufficient faith with an overwhelming love, way more than sufficient love.

Isn't that the kind of Person you want to know? Isn't that the kind of love you want in your life? That's who Jesus is, and that's what Jesus wants to do with YOU. To take hold of you, to love you, to heal you.

But Jesus is a gentleman. He 'stands at the door and knocks, waiting for us to open the door and let him in.' We don't need complete faith, but we do need sufficient faith. We need to want to be healed of our leprosy. Do you?

We all have leprosy of one form or another. Do you want to be healed of yours? If you do, admit it now to Jesus, who loves you with a love you can barely imagine, and who so very much wants to heal you, right now. The Holy Spirit is here with us this morning in power, ready to 'come upon' us if we ask, to bring healing.

Come to Jesus. He knows you, wants to heal you, wants to take hold of you in love.

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